Water Myths & Realities

Myth: We have less water today than we did 100 years ago.
Reality: There is the same amount of water on Earth today as there was when the Earth was formed three billion years ago. The difference is that today many more demands are placed on water. Because our demands on water continue to grow but our supplies don't, everyone should lend a hand to conserve, protect, and get involved with decisions that affect our water resources.

Myth: We don't have to think about drinking water.
Reality: We can no longer take our drinking water for granted. Public participation is vital to protecting our water resources, building adequate treatment plants, improving water delivery, analyzing costs versus risks, and enacting appropriate legislation.

Myth: Once you use water, it's gone.
Reality: After water is used, it's recycled ... innumerable times. Some water is recycled for use within a week, other water may not be used again for years. Water is resilient and responds well to treatment. However, using water and abusing water by contaminating lakes, streams, and wells with toxic chemicals are two different things. To keep our drinking water safe, we need not only appropriate treatment, but also appropriate source protection.

Myth: If lead is in your water, it's the treatment plant's fault.
Reality: The most common source of lead in drinking water is plumbing in your home. Your plumbing may have lead pipes or lead solder in the connections. Lead is a contaminant that is particularly harmful to pregnant women and young children. If you are concerned about lead in your water, contact your local health authorities or water utility to find out how you can have your water tested by a certified laboratory. If tests reveal that the lead content of your water is above 15 parts per billion, you should reduce your exposure to it.
Hints: 1. Since warm water absorbs more lead than cold, always use cold water when you cook.
2. Because water standing in pipes tends to absorb lead, clear the pipes before drinking by letting your tap run until the water is cold.

Myth: There are more pollutants in drinking water today than there were 25 years ago.
Reality: Not necessarily. Twenty-five years ago, we did not have the technology to know what was in our drinking water. Today, we have sophisticated testing instruments that enable us to know more about our water than ever before. The drinking water community is continually improving treatment processes as it learns more each year.

Myth: Using a home water treatment device will make tap water safer or healthier to drink.
Reality: Some people use home water filters to improve the taste, smell, or appearance of their tap water, but it does not necessarily make the water safer or healthier to drink. Additionally, all home treatment devices require regular maintenance. If the maintenance is not performed properly, water quality problems may result.

Myth: Bottled water is safer than tap water.
Reality: Not necessarily. Unlike tap water, the quality of finished bottled water is not government-monitored. Studies have shown that microbes may grow in the bottles while on grocers' shelves. You don't need to buy bottled water for safety reasons if your tap water meets all federal, state, or provincial drinking water standards. If you want water with a different taste, you can buy bottled water, but it costs up to 1,000 times more than tap water. Of course, in emergencies, bottled water can be a vital source of drinking water for people without water.

Myth: "New" water is better than treated water.
Reality: There is very little water on Earth that is new. Most of our water has been touched by some type of human or animal activity. Even in remote wilderness areas, studies have found bacteria contaminating water. Therefore, it's always best to drink water that you know has been treated. Before drinking water from a stream, boil it for one minute at sea level or three minutes at higher elevations. This will completely kill all bacteria, viruses, and germs.